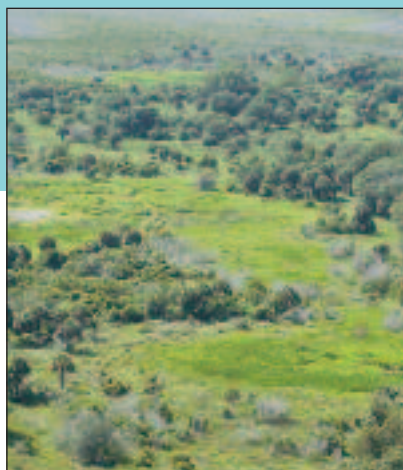


Hickory Hammock Refreshingly Rustic

Hike, camp, fish, enjoy wildlife on slice of old Florida



Hickory Hammock is open to the public.

Both require a permit. The District also allows hunting, regulated by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. The Florida Cracker Trail Association is busy restoring a vintage 1940s-era barn at the north end of the hammock to serve as a gathering place for horse riders.

The hiking trail itself is no more defined in some places than a path made by the repeated footsteps of youngsters hurrying to a favorite fishing hole. And as you walk further in, traffic noise gives way to bird songs, buzzing dragonflies and the rhythmic chirping of cicadas. Wild grape, scented wax myrtle, purple blooms of pickerel weed, French mulberry, hog plum, willow trees and patches of white flowered vetch mark the way from shady oak bunches to wetland marshes to upland fields.

There's no rule that hikers must stick to the beaten trail, McLemore said. Venture out for a closer look at a gopher tortoise tossing dirt from its burrow, or to get a better view of a circling osprey.

It is what Tony Braswell insists on doing when he comes out here from Sebring for a nature break. "You have to get off the trail to see it, but I see lots of wildlife – deer, hogs... even turkey," said Braswell, who was seeking solitude in the hammock one recent afternoon. "It's peaceful here. It's like what old Florida must have been like."

For a copy of the District's Public Use Guide, call (561) 682-6635.



Question selected from District letters and emails received from the public.

Q Is the South Florida Water Management District responsible for all southern Florida's neighborhood flood-control drainage systems? The wet and hurricane season is here!

A Is it summer already? Flood control in Florida is a shared responsibility. In most cases, localized flooding is the responsibility of your local county, municipality, secondary drainage districts, and/or neighborhood homeowner associations. While they should always be your first contacts, the South Florida Water Management District works with and assists them whenever possible; the District is responsible for safely conveying excess waters into regional storage areas or to the ocean. You can do your part by reporting, to the proper authority, the location and condition of any clogged, blocked or damaged drainage facilities, such as stormwater inlets, pipes, grates, culverts, swales, ditches, canals, dikes, berms or weirs. However, even the best maintained and functioning drainage systems cannot totally prevent flooding. For additional information, contact your nearest Service Center and ask for the Know the Flow brochure or visit www.sfwmd.gov

ANSWER TO FIND FREDDY

Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail

The 110-mile trail circles Lake Okeechobee – the second-largest freshwater lake in the contiguous United States – and spans four counties. Located atop the Herbert Hoover Dike, which surrounds the lake for flood protection, the trail is designated as a segment of the Florida National Scenic Trail. In addition to hiking and fishing, activities along the trail include boating, cycling, horseback riding, picnicking and camping.

Your Feedback Matters

Thank you to the hundreds of readers who responded to our recent *WaterMatters* survey. We appreciate your time, comments and suggestions. Generally, you like us – you really like us! For those who responded, we hope you are enjoying your postcards.

E-mail or call us with your comments and mailing list requests:
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Toll Free in FL 1-800-432-2045

CORRECTION: The previous issue of *WaterMatters* incorrectly identified water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*) as native to South Florida. We regret the error.

C R E D I T S

WaterMatters is produced by the South Florida Water Management District's Department of Public Information to inform the public about District projects and programs. An internet version is also available in English and Spanish at www.sfwmd.gov

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The South Florida Water Management District is a regional, governmental agency that oversees the water resources in the southern half of the state. It is the oldest and largest of the state's five water management districts.

Our mission is to manage and protect water resources of the region by balancing and improving water quality, flood control, natural systems and water supply.

Year 2, Issue 5

little ways north of the Istokpoga Canal, pull in at the sign marking the South Florida Water Management District's Hickory Hammock, step outside and get lost in 4,638 acres of natural terrain cutting loose on a Florida wild streak. Lose yourself in 8 miles of meandering trails that pass gracefully aging oaks bearded in Spanish moss, open plains sprinkled with colorful wildflowers and cabbage palm, peaceful lowland marshes lined with tall maiden-cane and saw palmetto, and a thriving community of critters that call Hickory Hammock home.

On this protected preserve, evidence of Florida's distant past unfolds in gentle layers. It is not difficult to look around and imagine what the Seminoles saw here centuries ago when they were its only stewards. Closer to the surface, telltale signs of Florida's legacy as an early trailblazer in America's cattle industry lie dormant in the overgrown terrain.

Hickory Hammock's natural beauty also holds promises of Florida's future. It is one of numerous properties acquired by the District and other state agencies in a quest to restore wildlands lost to the state's population surge.

Additionally, the upland hammock lays down a wide berth between civilization and the ongoing efforts to return the nearby Kissimmee River to its original state as a winding waterway flanked by sopping floodplains. Shorebirds and waterfowl are returning in surprisingly high numbers along the 15 miles of restored Kissimmee basin just a short feathered flight east of the hammock.

"What we're trying to do here is not only restore the Kissimmee River itself, but also we're protecting and restoring the adjacent uplands that are an integral part of that whole ecosystem," said Jeff McLemore, a District steward for the region.

But it isn't necessary to understand its role as a vital ecological link to enjoy Hickory Hammock. In addition to hiking, the District allows primitive camping (at two select sites) and horseback riding.

Kissimmee River Roundup

Celebrating 20 Years of Restoration Progress

Under a cool oak hammock on a warm spring day, Governor Jeb Bush joined federal, state and local partners to celebrate two decades of environmental restoration along the Kissimmee River.

"Delivering the right amount of water to the right places is restoring habitat and improving water quality," Governor Bush said. "I was awestruck by nature's restorative power," he added, commenting on his helicopter flight over the restored area on his way to the May 7 event.

More than 200 guests – many of whom had a hand in this world-renowned restoration project through the years – including former and current elected officials, South Florida Water Management District and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers representatives, scientists, engineers, environmentalists, local residents, students and a throng of media attended the "Kissimmee River Roundup" at the Edna Pearce Lockett Estate.

The first phase of restoration, completed in 2001, backfilled 7.5 miles of canal, reconnected 15 miles of river, carved a new river channel and reestablished flow to replenish approximately 11,000 acres of wetlands.

During the next decade, this massive environmental project will recarve 9 miles of river channel and revive habitat for more than 300 species of wildlife. The restoration will replenish 40 square miles of floodplain and marsh, filtering nutrients and providing water storage to benefit Lake Okeechobee, downstream estuaries and the greater Everglades ecosystem.



Gov. Jeb Bush (right) and Henry Dean field questions at the Kissimmee River Roundup.



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